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ABSTRACT

Background information and tips are presented to aid high school social studies classroom teachers as they develop and implement cultural awareness programs in which students research and write radio scripts about their own ethnic heritage. The document is presented in three sections. Section I explains how to research family history. Emphasis is placed on likely sources of information including novels, encyclopedias, and plays. Section II discusses interviewing technique, selection of people to interview, and interpretation of information which comes out during an interview. Also presented are suggestions to help students understand ethnic differences. Suggestions include drawing up a chart to identify a person's ethnic heritage more fully, listing holidays and ceremonies celebrated by an ethnic group, relating stories frequently told to children of the ethnic group, and listening to music commonly heard in the culture. The final section concentrates on radio production. Specifically, it focuses on how to write an outline once characters and plot are selected and how to begin a script. Topics discussed include scene changes, music, sound effects, and narratives. A sample script is included. (DB)

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New York Board of Education
Brooklyn, New York

"Stories My Family Told Me...
An Ethnic Heritage Studies
Project"

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Stories My Family Told Me

A kit to help students
research and write
radio scripts about
their ethnic heritage

by Anne Grant

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The City of New York

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Foreword

Of all media forms, radio demands the most of its writers' skills, for they cannot use pictures to enhance a mood or to clarify a point. With only their well-chosen words, music, and sound effects, radio playwrights carry their listeners to the outer reaches of space or to the inner thoughts of the individual.

These writers cannot rely on expensive sets and costumes to create their illusions. Nor would their listeners want them to. People who had flocked to television in the 1950s are now returning to radio, eager to use their imaginations again.

Radio is the best possible training ground for student writers. It is also ideal for those of us who want to cross continents and eras to recount our ethnic heritage.

This guide is designed to help students discover their ethnic heritage and introduce others to it through the radio series, "Stories My Family Told Me."

The complexity of life in this country leaves many of us feeling rootless. We need assurance that we belong to a heritage larger than ourselves --whether we entered it by birth or by choice and adoption.

People of all ages are eager to learn more about their ethnic heritage. But it is especially important for those of us who are younger to know of the factors that have influenced our families' histories. This knowledge helps us to see more clearly where our families are and how they got there. It helps us to make wiser decisions about where we want to go in the future.

As we hear about each other's ethnic heritage, we are likely to lose our ignorant prejudices against other people. And we may discover new options for ourselves.



Research

Go to the library, and look in the card catalogue for books about your ethnic group. You also can find information in encyclopedias.

Ask the librarian to help you locate other resources, such as novels or plays, which have been written about your ethnic heritage.



Interviews

Interview your parent or another relative or friend who is older than you and can remember things that happened in your family years ago.

You may want to explain that you sometimes feel confused when making decisions in your own life and that it would help to know more about their experiences. Most people like to help, and they will be glad to talk if they feel that their insights are useful to you. Relax, and let the other person do most of the talking.

Use the chart on the next page to identify this person's ethnic heritage more fully. Don't worry about filling in the chart completely. Keep listening to the stories the person tells to illustrate each point.

Some stories may be startlingly honest. Some will be funny, and others, tragic. Make notes of the ones that fascinate you the most, so you can return to them later.

Interviews (continued)

ETHNIC FACTORS	EXPECTATIONS OF OTHERS		HOPES, FEARS, FANTASIES...
What is this person's ethnic heritage?	Because of these factors, what was expected of this person: a. by the family? b. by outsiders?		In response to these factors and expectations, what were this person's fears, hopes, dreams, fantasies, etc.??*
Native nationality: Locality (rural, urban, etc.): Native language: Race: Sex: Religion: Family work and income: Family status in community: Other:			

*Be precise. For example, if the family was poor, this person may have dreamed of having money and a house of their own. If the family was fervently religious, the person may have feared hell. If outsiders prevented this person from participating in sports, then she or he may have dreamed of winning the Olympics.

Interviews (continued)

The following suggestions may help you gain more background details from the people you interview:

List the HOLIDAYS celebrated by this ethnic group.

Relate two STORIES frequently told to children.

Sing or record two ethnic SONGS.

Act out five GESTURES, facial or body movements common to this culture.

Describe CEREMONIES associated with life events such as births, holidays, marriages, birthdays, funerals.

Describe a day at SCHOOL.

List major historical EVENTS that affected these people such as hurricanes, floods, wars, epidemics.

Describe the daily FOOD and drink, as well as that prepared for special occasions.

Relate two very old STORIES which go back in the family for several generations and have been passed down from parents to children.

Explain how three popular children's GAMES were played.

Describe the most common MUSIC heard in this culture.

Discuss the two most prevalent CRIMES committed in this community, and describe the method of punishment.

Describe the important moments in religious WORSHIP.

Tell three funny stories that illustrate the culture's sense of HUMOR.

Describe the usual practice of MEDICINE for the most common illnesses in this culture.

Discuss the way MILITARY life affected the culture.

List three SUPERSTITIONS that many people believed.

Tell how young WOMEN AND MEN related to each other.

Describe the ART, DRAMA, and LITERATURE of the culture.

Tell how people sent NEWS from one town to another.

Describe the biggest CELEBRATION you remember.



Outline

From all the stories you have heard, choose one which would make a good radio production. Before you begin your outline, note the following:

A. PEOPLE

List the characters, and note how each one changes during the story.

B. PLOT

Sometimes events just happen. At other times, characters cause events to happen. List the events in order.

C. PACING

Sometimes characters feel peaceful and gentle, but at other times they get angry or excited. These different emotions affect the pacing of the story and make it move--fast, slow, very fast, sudden stop, fast again, and so forth.

On the next page, there is a chart. Write your characters' names in the boxes along the top. List the events down the side.

Then imagine how each character felt as various events occurred. Go down the column under each character's name, and write that person's feelings on the line following each event.

Don't try to fill in the entire chart. Just focus on those events and feelings which are important to your story.

Here is a list of some of the emotions your characters might feel. It may help you think of other feelings as you work on your chart.

Proud	Resentful
Irritated	Amazed
Inadequate	Strong
Dedicated	Embarrassed
Tense	Betrayed
Nervous	Jealous
Excited	Abandoned
Sorry	Suspicious
Inferior	Awkward
Bored	Worried
Discouraged	Bold
Determined	Shy
Afraid	Guilty
Frustrated	Eager

Outline (continued)

EVENTS	CHARACTERS					
	A.	B.	C.	D.	E.	F.
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						
6.						
7.						
8.						
9.						
10.						

Outline (continued)

Look back at the chart on page 6. Circle those boxes which you plan to include in your story. List them below in the order in which you think they should be presented.

Does your story start with a strong feeling or an exciting event to capture your audience's attention? Have you included some humor? Have you avoided too many long stretches of quiet emotions which may seem too slow to hold your audience's interest?

As you work on your outline, you may want to rearrange the feelings and events in order to pace the story differently.

D. PRODUCTION LIST

Study your outline, and think about how the final story should sound. Use a different colored pencil on your outline to indicate the following:

1. Scene changes--Where do the events take place? Stories often have three or four different locations, or "scenes." Note the scene changes.

2. Music--What style of music would go well with your production? Where would you like to hear music?

3. Sound effects--Describe the sound effects that would help you to set the scene and develop the plot.

4. Narration--Decide whether and where a narrator is needed to tell any parts of the story which the characters and action do not adequately relate.



Script

Once you have completed your outline, you are ready to begin a script. Remember that people seldom speak to each other in long sentences. In many brief exchanges, they may use only three or four words.

As you imagine an event, think of what each character would say. Speak the lines aloud to make sure they sound natural. Take out all the words that are unnecessary so the dialogue will move quickly and keep your listeners interested.

Read the sample script, and then write your own, using the same format.

And on with the show!

THE STUDENT WRITER #15

THE OUTSIDER

BY

BRENDA JOHNS
(PROSPECT HEIGHTS MS.)

ADAPTED BY IRVIN CHORSHAK

WYTE-FM

CAST

SARAH (MARR, MS SENIOR)	TANYA (PAUL'S GIRL FRIEND)
PAUL (OLDER BROTHER)	MARY (YOUNG SISTER)
MOTHER	JAMES (YOUNG BROTHER)

SMALL PARTS

WILLIE (PAUL'S FRIEND)	VOICE (1)
WAITRESS	VOICE (2)
TEENAGER	VOICE (3)
ANOTHER TEEN	

MUSIC

55 James Brown record--background
78 Soul music--background
89 James Brown record--background
109 Sad soul music--background
133 Sad soul music--under

SOUND

1 Street noises--under scene
18 One carefully walking down stairs
21 Shaken tambourine
26 Roar of siren in street
32 Siren fading into distance
64 Street noises in background
77 Cat's meow
107 Beer cans thrown

THE STUDENT WRITER #15
THE OUTSIDER
BY
BRENDA JOHNS
(PROSPECT HEIGHTS HS)
ADAPTED BY IRWIN CONSHAK

WHITE-FM

1 SOUND:
2 SARAH:
(HARR)

(STREET NOISES...UNDER SCENE)
On a warm day in October, I scuffled home
silently, leaping occasionally over a mud
puddle. On the corner sat two boys listlessly
staring at every passer-by, selecting choice
epithets to spit at each one.

Hello, honey.

3 WILLIE:
4 SARAH:
5 WILLIE:

Leave me alone.
You're so ugly, you oughta be glad I wasted my
time!

6 PAUL:

Shut up. That's my sister. She ain't like the
girls you go out with, Willy.

7 WILLIE:

(JOKING) Hmm--never had the pleasure. You
gotta introduce me sometime.
For miles the grey buildings extended, the
monotonous view broken only by Bodega Hispana
or Smith's Grocery Store--Provisions Direct
from the South. Women sat on the stoops talking
to other women with babies in their arms. Little
children amused themselves with the traditional
games.

8 SARAH:
(HARR)

(more)

9 MARY:

2

53 #15

10. JAMES:

Red light, green light--one two, three!
(SCREAMS) I caught you moving!
I didn't move! I didn't move!

11. SARAH:
(HARR)

Teenagers hung out of windows whooping and
shrieking to their friends.
(OFF MIKE, CALLS) I like bread and butter--
but I hate "welfare ham"!

12. TEENAGER

I like bread and jam--I like bread and butter--
but I hate "welfare ham"!

13. ANOTHER TEEN:

(OFF MIKE, LAUGHS) Whooooo, Thelma!
Whooooo!

14. SARAH:
(HARR)

I wove in and out of clumps of dodging children
and I was reluctant to enter the shabby tenement.
(RUEFUL LAUGH) What a cliché! I live in a ghetto
so typical it's unbelievable! I'm even the
usual fatherless Negro child who grows up in
a matriarchal society! Ha!

15. MOTHER:

(OFF MIKE, CALLS) Sarah! Is that you, Daughter!
Sarah!

16. SARAH:

(WEARY, CALLS) Yeah--it's me, Ma.

17. MOTHER:

(TOWARDS MIKE) Just let your old mother walk
down these stairs.

18. SOUND:

(ONE CAREFULLY WALKING DOWN STAIRS)

19. MOTHER:

(TIRED) Too much weight on this old body for
these stairs...your Ma's just too old.
Going out, Ma? Got your tambourine, I see.
(SHAKES TAMBOURINE)

20. SARAH:

21. SOUND:

(more)

Script (continued)

SW #15

22 MOTHER: (BRIGHTENS) Yes, Sarah honey--I'm going to a Holiness meeting. I ain't been shopping this week. So you get supper from the luncheonette.
 23 SARAH: (DEJECTED) Okay, Ma.
 24 MOTHER: (AWAY FROM MIKE) The Lord saves, Daughter! The Lorrrd Saves!
 25 SARAH: (WARR) I walked into the dreary apartment. The odor of incense permeated every crevice of the place... and flopped onto the battered moth-eaten couch. choking me. I threw my books down on the table (CRIES) Damn that smell! Incense! (SOFTLY) I picked up my math book...Algebra saves... $7x+6x=30...$ $15x=30...$ $x=2...$ there's peace in Algebra...PEACE!
 26 SOUND: (ROAR OF SIREN IN STREET)
 27 SARAH: (WARR) An excited roar came from down the block. I ran to the window. Although this type of thing was commonplace, I wanted to see what would happen this time. THIS TIME! I saw a blur of brown, beige and tan converging on the sidewalk below...
 28 VOICE (1): (OFF MIKE, CALLING) Jump, Mike! Jump!
 29 VOICE (2): (OFF MIKE, CALLING) Show em how to do it, Old man! Jump! Jump!
 30 VOICE (3): (OFF MIKE, CALLING) Kill yourself, Mike! Go-on! Kill yourself! (more)

SW #15

31 SARAH: (TO HERSELF) Oh my God--Mike's trying to commit suicide again! (CRIES) Don't do it, Mike! Don't do it! (TO HERSELF) Aah--the cops stopped him. This place is enough to make me want to jump sometimes. (NARRATES) Mike's just a harmless old man, who bothers no one and sits alone by his window, painting or writing poems. But no one understands him. They make fun of him.
 32 SOUND: (SIREN FADING INTO THE DISTANCE)
 33 SARAH: (WARR) Once again I settled back on the dank-smelling couch. Then my younger brother and sister came whooping into the room--
 34 MARY: (DO FOLLOWING SCENE QUICKLY)
 35 SARAH: Miss Sarah Mack, Mack, Mack--all dressed in black, black, black!
 36 JAMES: How quiet--quiet!
 37 SARAH: With silver buttons, buttons, buttons--all down her back, back, back!
 38 MARY: How can I study?
 39 SARAH: She ask her mother, mother, mother--for fifty cents, cents, cents!
 40 JAMES: Shut up!
 To see the elephant, elephant, elephant-- jump over the fence, fence, fence!

(more)

SW #15

5

41 SARAH: Get out! Get out of here!
 (LAUGH AS THEY GO) Miss Sarah Mack, Mack, Mack-
 42 BOTH: sits on a tack, tack, tack!
 Ooooh--it was futile to study. My thoughts
 43 SARAH: drifted to the subject of childhood. I wished
 (NARR) that I could be a carefree child without the
 worries of a high school senior. Why be a
 child, though? To be like sister Mary and
 brother James, tiny starvelings caked with
 indelible street dust--who moan in their sleep
 with a stomach churning imaginary food?
 44 TANYA: (OFF MIKE, LAUGHING, HORSING AROUND) Oooh,
 Paul! Don't you be so fresh! Ooo-eees!
 45 PAUL: (OFF MIKE, LAUGHING) Sweetie pie, you're the
 apple of my eeeyee!
 (CONTINUE LAUGHING AND HORSING AROUND)
 46 NARR: Echoes resounded from the stairs...clumsy people
 stumbling noisily to the third floor. My
 older brother Paul entered with a girl heavily
 made up, in a tight dress and high heels.
 (STILL LAUGHING) Hi, Sister--hi!
 47 PAUL: (GIGGLES) Hi, Sister-in-Law-To-Be!
 48 TANYA: (COLD) Hi, Paul..Hi, Tanya...
 49 SARAH: (BOTH LAUGH AND POOL UNDER NARRATION)
 But I wanted to say to her "You louse! If you
 50 SARAH: hadn't messed up Paul's life, he would've gone
 (NARR) to college and we'd have someone in the family
 making something of himself!" (more)

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SW #15

51 PAUL: (POOLING) Sarah--now how do you treat a
 special lady guest? Come on--
 52 SARAH: (PHONY) Tanya..why don't you sit down. I'll
 bring you both a beer.
 53 TANYA: (GIGGLES) Make mine a big one, Sister Sarah!
 A billing one!
 54 SARAH: I brought them the drinks. Then I sat cramped
 (NARR) on one side of the couch while Paul and Tanya
 sprawled comfortably on the other side. Tanya
 reached for the record player..
 55 MUSIC: JAMES BROWN RECORD--LOUD--THEN INTO BACKGROUND
 56 SARAH: Do you have to play those records all the time?
 57 TANYA: Of course we do, lambie-pie.
 I like James Brown. Now how about you getting
 58 SARAH: us something nice to eat?
 59 PAUL: (ANGRILY) Now do you come in here and tell
 60 SARAH: me what--
 (PACIFYING) Sarah, please--
 Anyway there ain't no dinner! Ma's gone to
 the Nolliness meeting. She told me to get
 61 TANYA: supper from the luncheonette.
 62 PAUL: I like chicken! Fried chicken!
 63 SARAH: (PLEADS) Sarah, go. Get chicken tonight.
 64 SOUND: Yeah, chicken...(FADES) yeah, yeah, yeah...
 65 SARAH: (STREET NOISES IN BACKGROUND)
 (NARR) Mary and James were playing on the stoop...
 66 MARY: Sarah jump over the fence, fence, fence
 (more)

Script (continued)

SV #15

7

67 JAMES: She jump so high, high, high
68 MARY: Sarah touch the sky, sky, sky!
69 SARAH: You two get up to the house now! I'm going
to get the supper!
Sarah, never come back, back, back--
70 JAMES: Till the Fourth of July, ly, ly!
71 MARY: I wish I never had to come back.
72 SARAH: (LAUGHING, AWAY FROM MIKE) Sarah Mack, Mack,
73 BOTH: Mack--is gonna pack, pack, pack...
(CAT'S MEOW)
74 SOUND: I noticed a stray cat strolling in and out of
75 SARAH: (NARR) the gutter, skinny from the slim pickings of
the garbage cans. Rich people throw away
good garbage. But pity the poor slum cat.
(CALLS) Where're you going in such a hurry,
76 WILLIE: sugar? Why don't you stay and visit?
There were those young men again, the ones who
77 SARAH: (NARR) stand on corners. I reached the luncheonette.
I slipped into the neon-lit place.
78 MUSIC: INTRODUCE SOUL MUSIC IN BACKGROUND
79 SARAH: (NARR) The tables were crowded with fatigued workers
languidly shoveling greasy greens and ham into
their mouths.
80 WAITRESS: What's your order, honey?
81 SARAH: Chicken dinner for four. (more)

26

SV #15

8

82 WAITRESS: Coming right up. Anything to drink?
83 SARAH: Large bottle Coke.
84 WAITRESS: Here it is. Eat well, honey.
85 MUSIC: OUT
86 SARAH: (NARR) I eased slowly out of the luncheonette,
quickly ran through the street with the
87 WILLIE: chicken diners and coke...
(CALLS) Where you running, sugar! Stop--
88 SARAH: (NARR) I want to talk to you!
And I rushed into my tenement hopping two steps
89 MUSIC: at a time to the third floor.
90 SARAH: (NARR) SNEAK IN JAMES BROWN RECORDS AGAIN BACKGROUND
Tanya lay on the couch, her limpid brown eyes
glistening with beery contentment. Paul sat on
the floor monotonously dabbing at the same
spot on his glasses. The television set
was on...feeding hokum to Mary and James.
91 MARY: Nice lawn.
92 JAMES: Yeah, two white kids.
93 MARY: And a swell mother and father.
94 SARAH: (NARR) Bull! The unreality of a white middle-class
home with everyone loving each other and
staying together. Television--you lie!
95 PAUL: You got the food?
96 SARAH: (SURLY) Yeah, I got it. (TO YOUNGSTERS) You
little kids got any homework today?
(more)

27

12

Script (continued)

SW #15

9

97 JAMES: Heah!
 98 MARY: Heah!
 99 SARAH: Don't you ever get any homework? I'm going to see your teacher!
 100 TANYA: (WHEEDLING) Come on, Sarah--let's have some of that chicken! I'm starved!
 101 SARAH: Why don't you go home to your own rother instead of being our parasite! It's bad enough being on welfare without shiftless outsiders sucking up our blood!
 102 TANYA: You listen here, you plain thing! Nobody around here likes you, Miss Priss! What boy do YOU go out with?
 103 SARAH: None of your business!
 104 TANYA: Ha! I talked to all the boys around here and they say they wouldn't go out with you for a bribe! Always going around in the cloud, you ain't worth--
 105 SARAH: You've been out with just about every man in this neighborhood, haven't you, deary?
 106 TANYA: I'll get you! I'll get you!
 107 SOUND: (BEER CANS THROWN)
 108 SARAH: (HARR) I ducked a barrage of beer cans as I fled to r-
 109 MUSIC: SNEAK IN SAD BACKGROUND MUSIC...SOUL (more)

28

10

SW #15

110 SARAH: (HARR)
 I just lay on my bed staring hypnotically at the light bulb suspended from the ceiling. I have friends, white kids in Flatbush. And their mothers graciously invite me over... (SARAH IMITATES MOTHERS--SARCASM)
 111 SARAH-MOTHER (PERFECT DICTION) Yes, I'm inviting Sarah, that sweet little Negro child, to Wendy's party. She's so clean and nice.
 112 SARAH-MOTHER (2) Oh yes, Martha, and she isn't ready...think of the deprived area she comes from--but, tut--remember the riots.
 113 SARAH: (ANGRILY) DAMN! DAMN! DAMN! Keep your party! If I invited your daughters back--the place would repel them! My mother would repel them And the boys on the corner would insult them! (TEARS) I got to think of happy things....I'm going to go to college...I'm going to be accepted...I'm going to board at college and get away from Tanya and everyone else!
 114a MUSIC: OUT
 114 SOUND: (OFF MIKE...DOOR SLAMMED)
 115 SARAH: (HARR) The front door slammed...my mother.
 116 MOTHER: Paul, where's Sarah?
 117 PAUL: In her room.
 118 MOTHER: What's wrong?
 119 TANYA: Mrs. Johnson, your daughter was upset tonight (more)

29

13

Script (continued)

30

SW #15

11

120 MOTHER: She yelled at me. I think she needs more social life. Girls shouldn't be too educated. They just have to know how to take care of a houseful kids.

121 SARAH: (NARR) Tanya, I wish you was my kid. That girl of mine goes around with her head in a cloud. Maybe we'll get her a boyfriend. I choked inwardly when I heard my mother talk to oily voice Tanya. No houseful kids for me! No boyfriend either--not if I could fight off my mother long enough to talk with the college people and get accepted. She came in my room.

122 MOTHER: Sarah, are you sick?

123 SARAH: No, Ma.

124 MOTHER: Remember, you're not supposed to yell at Tanya.

125 SARAH: Yes, Ma.

126 MOTHER: We gonna fix it so you won't have to worry about a boyfriend or anything like that.

127 SARAH: (FRESH) Thanks a lot--thanks a lot.

128 MOTHER: Don't you sass me! You ungrateful thing! I slave here at home for you--

129 SARAH: (SOFTLY) That's a lie.

130 MOTHER: And you go yelling like you was crazy. What will the neighbors think? My child is crazy?

131 SARAH: (EXPLODES) Get out of here! Get out of here, Ma!

(more)

SW #15

12

132 MOTHER: I ain't got a daughter! I got an enemy in my own house!

133 MUSIC: ~~SAD...SOUL...UNDO~~

134 SARAH: Cars sped along the avenue. Drunken revelers chorused loud hymns of praise to the lamp-posts. Girls out on scoops flirted, and boys serenaded girls loudly. I thought and thought.. will I going to college make a difference... will I forget my people...or will I return to the ghetto and try to help...Oh, Ma...I need you...I need you badly.

135 MOTHER: (WITH MURMUR) Sarah, you feeling better now, girl? You better?

136 SARAH: (TEARS) Oh Ma...Ma...

137 MUSIC: ~~SOFT PIANO~~

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Stories My Family Told Me

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